



The Ames Intelligencer

Published by Ames Heritage Association, Inc.
Member of American Association for Local & State History

Early African-American Families of Ames

by Farwell T. Brown

The following is part two of a two-part special article about early African-American families of Ames. The first part of this article appeared in the Winter 1990-1991 issue of The Ames Intelligencer.

The third African - American to graduate from Iowa State was Walter G. Madison. He received a degree in engineering from Iowa State College in 1914, having first completed work at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama where George Washington Carver had become president after leaving Ames. Madison established a successful plumbing business here and built his home on the corner of Third and Hazel where he resided for nearly 17 years with his wife and three boys. His first son, Walter G. Madison, Jr., born in 1918, was said to have been the first African-American boy born in Ames. Madison moved to Nashville, Tennessee in about 1930 where he was very successful in the plumbing contract business. He later moved to Washington, D.C. where he became a professor of engineering at Howard University. Walter Madison died in 1964, and his son, Walter, Jr., also a graduate of Iowa State, died in 1985 in Washing-

ton. He had been in the plumbing contract business, having started that business in partnership with his father. Of the Madison children, Ira, the youngest, survives and is a consulting engineer in California.

While living in Ames, Walter Madison's place of business was in the Masonic Building when it first opened in 1916. Later he was located in the Olsan Building on the southwest corner of Main and Burnett. He constructed some of the city's sewer systems during Ames' big paving project of 1916-17. He contracted for a number of large construction jobs while living in Ames and was credited with writing part of the first Iowa Plumbing Code. I remember the man quite well since he did the plumbing work on our home when my father remodeled our house in 1918.

Madison was a public-spirited young man. In 1915, he wrote a letter to the editor of the *Ames Weekly Tribune*. A traveling troupe had just put on a tent show presentation of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in Ames. Grateful for writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Madison explained at length that it was now "not the message of the Uncle Tom's Cabin of fifty years ago, but . . . we need respect, pure and simple respect - not an abstract, something unearned, but due recognition for our status in the things that measure men."

In August of 1917, Madison personally entertained 30 black soldiers from Camp Dodge who spent a Satur-

day afternoon and evening in Ames. Following a tour of Ames, an evening banquet was provided for his guests at the Alumni Hall on the campus where several local businessmen addressed them.



Walter Madison was the third black person to graduate from Iowa State College, receiving an engineering degree in 1914. While in Ames, he established a successful plumbing business, constructed portions of the city's sewer system, and is credited with writing part of the state's first plumbing code. This photo was taken when Madison was professor of engineering at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

A black student whom I remember was Harry Romm, a student who got his B.S. degree from Iowa State in 1930. He returned for a masters degree in 1934 and a Ph.D. degree in 1946. It was about 1928 when he was one of several botany and horticultural students who regularly spent their Saturdays at our place working in my father's flower gardens. Gardening was my father's hobby since he had always been something of an expert in horticulture. Harry Romm finished at Iowa State and took over the horticulture work for a time at Tuskegee Institute while George Washington Carver was still there. When Romm returned for his graduate degree work, I recall that he lived at the Archie Martin home.



Archie Martin, Sr. worked for the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad when he and his family lived in Ames. Archie and his wife Nancy established a strong family tradition in their home on Lincoln Way.

Their Work and Influence

Archie Martin was a longtime employee of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad where he was an assistant to the yard master here in Ames. Known for his reliability and capabilities on the job, he carried those characteristics into his family responsibilities. One of his granddaughters, now residing in Ames, recently related her fond memories of her grandfather. "Everyone should have a Grandpa

Martin" was how she summed up her feelings. Something of that same idea can be found in the comments of those black residents of Ames who were here when Archie Martin was considered the patriarch of the Ames black community.

John Shipp, Sr. was Archie Martin's son-in-law. For 48 years, he was in charge of the daily maintenance of the Sheldon-Munn Hotel. Those were the years when the hotel was at its peak operation, the social center and show place in downtown Ames. When John Shipp died in 1963, he had 12 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Of his three sons and four daughters, only John Shipp, Jr. resides today in Ames.

From Ames Into the "Real" World

The youngest son of John Shipp, Sr. is Ret. Col. Grantland Shipp, now of Silver Springs, Maryland. On several occasions, I have had the opportunity to visit with Col. Shipp in Washington and in Ames when he returned recently for a family reunion. His mother, the former Nellie Martin, now in her late nineties, resides in Grantland Shipp's home in Silver Springs. I was fortunate to have had an opportunity to visit with Mrs. Shipp when she was

with her son on an Ames visit.

One thing that Grantland has to say about his experience growing up in Ames is that, when it came to racial relationships, it might be said that he has had the reverse of the experience of many African-American folks who grew up in other parts of the country. When he was attending Iowa State and made a trip to Ft. Sill, Oklahoma with his R.O.T.C. unit, he tells how the white students informed eating establishments in Oklahoma that "if he doesn't eat here, we don't eat here either." He has since traveled from the more considerate environment of Ames, Iowa, into the more segregated societies of the south and our national capital. Most blacks living elsewhere, especially in the south, have seen their environment improved by the social changes that have taken place only in recent years.

When Shipp graduated from Iowa State, he received a commission in the United States Army. On his way to Ft. Sill for Army duty, he was asked at one point to "move to the back of the car" when all others traveling in his car were white. It was then that he stood up to the demand and refused the request. Shipp's military career has contained remarkable chapters. He received the rank of colonel in May 1976. Shipp's own self-respect had been de-



The young Shipp family poses for the camera. In the back row, left to right, are Lamar Shipp, John Shipp, Sr., Nellie Martin Shipp, and John Shipp, Jr. In the front row, left to right, are Julia Nell, Thelma, Grantland, and Mildred. The children are still living, but only John Shipp, Jr. lives in Ames.

veloped in Ames and in the Ames school system where he tells me that there were teachers who had a "lasting impact" upon him.

Herman Banning Story

Herman Banning, the son of Riley and Cora Banning, came to Ames in 1919 with his parents so that he might study engineering at Iowa State. His interest in aviation was of special significance, because Banning became the first black flyer to obtain a federal pilot's license and was the first black flyer to make a transcontinental flight. I recall Banning's shop on Third Street. That was where teen-aged boys obtained what we called "wing dope" to put on our model airplanes. His story has been covered in connection with accounts relating to Ames aviation history. His chapter in black aviation is today on exhibit in the Smithsonian aviation museum in Washington, D.C.



Herman Banning came to Ames in 1919 to study engineering. He distinguished himself by becoming the first black flyer to make a transcontinental air flight in 1932.

No Exception to Existence of Discrimination

The treatment of minorities in Ames may have been somewhat better than the national average, but Ames has not always been the ideal in that respect. There have been both written and unwritten covenants when it came

to business and social activities. In 1922, Walter Madison took a client into an Ames restaurant on Main Street for their noon meal. The proprietor told them that they had to leave because he did not serve black people. Madison brought suit against the restaurant and was represented in the Story County District Court by the law firm of Lee and Garfield. He won the verdict. The award was only \$100.00, but the win was considered important.

In my visits with Mary Martin Carr, a granddaughter of Archie Martin and a cousin of Grantland Shipp, and with others of the present generation of these early Ames black families, I have clearly detected feelings of appreciation for the opportunities offered by life here. At the same time, these people have had to adjust their lives to slights and slurs of various kinds. In the mid-1940s, when World War II was nearing its end, Iowa State found it expedient to avoid letting black home economics students live in a home management dormitory. Following letters published in the *Des Moines Register* written by several Iowa State graduate students, that situation was soon corrected.

The life experiences in Ames of these early African-Americans were in the mind of one of Archie Martin's grandsons when he used the words "island" or "oasis" in his reference to Ames as compared with his experiences in other parts of the country. That Ames has not had a typical racial situation has been due, in part, to its historical circumstance. The black families who chose to make Ames their home have contributed to making Ames a good place to live. To them goes their share of the credit.

Some of the second and third generation representatives of those earliest black families have found their places here in the community. Al Martin will be remembered as a stand-out on both the football and basketball teams at Ames High in the 1920s. Paul Martin worked with Bob Williams in his shoe repair shop for years on Main Street. Paul's daughter, Mary Martin Carr, already mentioned, is a rehabilitation nurse at Mary Greeley Medical Center. Pauline Martin, Mary's sister, is a longtime D.O.T. employee, and John Shipp, Jr. retired



Archie Green, great-granddaughter of Archie and Nancy Martin, graduated from Ames High School in 1963 where she was student body president. She received her doctoral degree in English in 1990.

here in Ames after working many years with the Sheldon-Munn Hotel.

Others have moved out into other parts of the country. Robert Martin's son Fred was student body president during his senior year at Ames High and today is a dentist in Washington, D.C. Grantland Shipp, who reached the rank of colonel in the U.S. Army, was another who was president of his class during his Ames High years.

A special example is that of Archie Greene who graduated from Ames High in 1963. A great-granddaughter of Archie and Nancy Martin, Archie's beautiful voice stood out in her participation in the musical activities at Ames High. She is another of the Martin-related families who was chosen president of the Ames High student body. Stricken while a student at Penn State University with a paralyzing disease, Archie Greene has earned the admiration of many Ames folks. Through perseverance on her part, she recently attained her Ph.D. degree in English at the University of Iowa in Iowa City.

Through the years, other black families have made their homes in Ames. Tom Jackman, whose twin daughters, Esther and Ethel, had mar-

ried brothers Paul and Bob Martin, moved to Ames in 1942. He was 81 then, and he attained the age of 100 when he died in 1963. Jackman, a retired farmer, worked for Judge Lee for a time and was a neighbor of mine. I became well acquainted with him when I discovered that he was a reliable source of information related to livestock matters. In time, there has been some increase in African-American residents associated with the university, both staff and students. Numbers, however, remain relatively low.

My feeling is that those first Ames African-American families can be called special pioneers. They were good people. They were good citizens. Their children and grandchildren, the ones that I have known or have heard about, now represent them well. But I believe they would tell you that racial problems are still with us; there remains much more to be accomplished. The words of Walter Madison, expressed in his letter to the local paper in 1915, and the words of



Fred Martin, son of Bob and Ethel Martin, was president of his Ames High class of 1949. Today he is a dentist in the Washington, D.C. area.

Mrs. Gater, spoken in 1918 to the five black men from Ames who were departing for service in World War I, remain as appropriate today as they were then.



Mary (Martin) Carr, daughter of Paul and Esther Martin, graduated from Ames High School in the class of 1958. She is a graduate of Iowa Methodist's nurses training program. Today she is nurse manager of the Physical Rehabilitation Center at the Mary Greeley Medical Center.

1915 City Hall: A Historic Landmark

by Rose Rollenhagen

A forgotten treasure stands on the southeast corner of Fifth and Kellogg. Most recently known as the "Public Safety Building," the name "1915 City Hall" or "Municipal Building" more accurately describes its use for the majority of its years.

Ames' first city hall/fire station was built on the same site in 1886. It was razed in 1915 to make way for the new city hall/fire station. This site was in continuous use for city government purposes from 1886 to 1990.

The 1915 City Hall is a landmark of Ames' transition from a pioneer village to a city. The late 1800s and early 1900s was a period of rapid growth for Ames. The population nearly quadrupled from 1,307 persons in 1885 to 5,091 persons in 1915. The city's platted area increased tenfold between 1875 and 1915. Many schools, churches, and residences, as well as Ames' first public library and its first hospital were built. The city created a system of public works, including streets, sewer, water, and a power plant.

By 1915, the small two-story, two-room brick building that served as the city hall/fire station was woefully inadequate. A committee was appointed to survey architectural firms, and the prominent Des Moines firm of Liebbe, Nourse & Rasmussen was selected. This firm practiced from 1898 to 1926 and rivaled Proudfoot & Bird for state supremacy. Other Liebbe, Nourse & Rasmussen designs in Ames included the 1913 Ames Savings Bank, the Masonic Temple (now the Octagon) and the original Mary Greeley Hospital. Their work on the I.S.U. campus included the old landscape architecture building and The Knoll. To date, our 1915 City Hall is the only known city hall designed exclusively by Liebbe, Nourse & Rasmussen. Based on this fact and the overall integrity of the building, the State Historical Society has declared this building to be eligible for listing on the national historic registry.

The design of the 1915 City Hall was dignified and spacious. Its Classical Revival style expressed the Midwestern

ideal of economic, democratic government. High-quality materials were used, including Boone brick and Bedford limestone. Marble lined the vestibule and was used for baseboard in the front corridor. State-of-the-art terrazzo floors were laid for high-traffic areas, with hardwood floors in other areas.

Three skylights provided natural daylight on the landing of the main stairway and in the drafting room. The council chambers was a large room (28' X 54') which spanned the east-west depth of the building to the fire station on the east. Oak doors and woodwork, florentine glass, and plaster beams and pilasters grace the interior.

Most of the architectural features of this building are still intact, although some lie hidden behind partition walls and suspended ceilings. The exterior remains relatively intact except for replacement of doors and windows.

In short, the 1915 City Hall is a well-designed, well-built landmark that represents a large part of our city's history.

Updates

Election Results Announced

At the annual meeting held January 1991, the following persons were elected to serve as officers for 1991: President Kathy Svec, Vice-President Don Faas, Secretary Ann Watts, and Treasurer Bill LaGrange.

The following persons serve on the Ames Heritage Association Board of Directors: Jack Adams, Everett Ritland, Dwight Herold, Ann Watts, and Clair Keller (terms to expire 1992); Lee Himan, Bev Kudla, Bill LaGrange, Kathy Svec, and Sharon Wirth (terms to expire 1993); and Cele Burnett, Elaine Bath, Don Fass, George McJimsey, and Dean Stebbins (terms to expire 1994).

The Board of Directors meets the third Monday of each month, September through June. Meetings begin at 7 p.m. and are held at Willson-Beardshear School, 920 Carroll, unless otherwise announced. Members of the Ames Heritage Association are always welcome to attend the monthly board meetings and are encouraged to share their ideas.

Ames Heritage Association Honored

The Ames Historic Preservation Commission recently presented recognition awards for a variety of historic preservation activities accomplished in the city. These awards are intended to assist in the promotion of the educational, cultural, and economic welfare of the public and to encourage the continuation of historic preservation activities in the future. The awards are given in recognition of work done to building exteriors and sites and for significant achievements that promote public awareness of historic preservation.

Among those receiving awards were the Ames Heritage Association, represented by Kathy Svec and Rose Rollenhagen, for their efforts in supporting the application to nominate the Public Safety Building as a historic landmark, as well as the Hoggatt School volunteers for volunteering their time at the school to promote public awareness of historic preservation.

Congratulations to the Association and all its volunteers!

Bauge House Update

by Sharon Wirth

This fall, reconstruction of the lean-to portion of the Bauge Home was begun under the direction of Ben Svec and Dennis Dobson of the Falls Millwork Company. The floor deck and roof have been completed, while some work remains on the walls and windows. Crafting the reproduction windows is currently underway.

An open house at the site has been scheduled for Sunday, June 30, 1991 from 2-4 p.m. More information and open house details will be included in a special supplemental newsletter early this summer. Meanwhile, a slide presentation providing an overview of this project is available for interested groups. If you have questions about the log house project or wish to schedule a slide presentation, contact restoration coordinator Sharon Wirth at 515/233-2415.

Historical and Architectural Survey Begins

Under the auspices of the City of Ames Planning and Housing Department and Ames Historic Preservation Commission, the firm, Dunbar/Jones Partnership of Des Moines, will conduct a survey of historic buildings, structures, and districts in Ames during the next few months. The purpose of the survey is to identify those resources which, because of their historical and architectural significance, may be eligible for local historical designation and nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. The corporate limits of Ames in 1843 form the geographic boundaries of this survey. The survey includes the Iowa State University campus. The downtown area of Ames will be the object of intensive survey.

The historical and architectural surveys will provide city planners with an inventory of significant buildings in Ames which will help ensure that these buildings benefit from the city's planning efforts. The surveys will help property owners understand their buildings and encourage their preservation. The surveys will lay the groundwork for potential grants-in-aid

from state and federal agencies. The surveys also foster local pride and help make communities better places to live.

Volunteers are needed to research local newspapers to document local historical themes and the construction of buildings and to identify, photograph, and record information about buildings in the field. Volunteers receive training in these activities and participate in regular meetings to share information. If you would like to participate in this project, which runs through October 1991, contact AHA President Kathy Svec at 515/232-4877

Ames Heritage Association Officers

President Kathy Svec
603 Grand Avenue, Ames
232-4877

Vice-President Don Faas
4419 Ross Road, Ames
232-1613

Secretary Ann Watts
3619 Mary Circle, Ames
292-5228

Treasurer Bill LaGrange
2800 Torrey Pines Road, Ames
292-4131

Editor Cele Burnett
1214 Curtiss, Ames
232-2791

Ames Official Historian
Farwell T. Brown
1802-20th Street, Ames
232-9444

The Ames Heritage Association meets the third Monday of every month (September through June) at 7:00 p.m. at Willson-Beardshear School, 920 Carroll, Ames.

The annual membership meeting is held the third Monday of January. Time and place are announced in advance.

The Ames Intelligencer is published three times a year—winter, spring, and fall.



From meetings of the Board of Directors of the Ames Heritage Association:

- Financial reports indicated a general fund balance of \$3,075.14, a Bauge House fund balance of \$2,753.70, and a Clint Adams Memorial Fund balance of \$935.00 as of April 1991;
- Reports by the membership committee indicated a good response from renewal and recruitment efforts;
- Reports concerning the Bauge House restoration project indicated that Phase II work continues, including reproduction of the windows, painting the exterior of the building, repair and reproduction of the doors, installation of protective shutters on the doors and windows, repair of the lean-to walls, and stabilization of the north wall of the house. The committee also reported that the dedication and open house of the

Bauge Home is scheduled for Sunday, June 30, 1991 from 2-4 p.m. (see information elsewhere), that the Neta Snook Questors will present their quilt and the Fredrica Shattuck Questors will sell cloth dolls as a fundraising project at the open house, and that the state Questors donated \$500 for reproduction of the shutters, doors, and painting;

- Reports concerning Hoggatt School recognized Don Faas and students from Ames High School for their maintenance work on the school house;
- Reports concerning the Billy Sunday cemetery marker indicated that the Ames Community Arts Council (ACAC) donated \$200 for the project, that displays were scheduled for the mall and City Hall this spring, that the brochure will be available for distribution once the plaque is in place, and that the dedication and

stone placement will occur later this year;

- AHA participated in the ACAC Salute to the Arts in May and Preservation Week activities in May;
- ACAC loaned the Association \$400 to fund the publication of the "Faces of our Founders" booklet about Ames' early founders as a fundraising project for the organization. Funds from the Clint Adams Memorial Fund will also be used to fund the booklet, which will be ready for distribution later this year;
- Election results were announced (see information elsewhere);
- Committee assignments and goals were established;
- Reports concerning efforts to list the Public Safety Building as a historical site indicated that the Ames Historic Preservation Commission approved the proposal prepared by Kathy Svec and Rose Rollenhagen (see information elsewhere).

The Ames Intelligencer
Ames Heritage Association
P.O. Box 821
Ames, Iowa 50010

Non-Profit U.S. Postage PAID Permit No. 122 Ames, Iowa 50010
